

DETROIT NEWS

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Group sees peril in U.S. snooping

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Imagine a United States in which the government has run roughshod over civil rights, staging numerous break-ins and wiretaps in an effort to wipe out dissent.

That's not just an Orwellian fantasy, charges a national group called American Citizens for Honesty in Government.

The federal threat to liberties exists today, insists the Michigan chapter of the organization. Its members demonstrated yesterday in front of Detroit's Federal Building, calling on government workers to blow the whistle on illegal acts.

"In a democracy, the citizens must take charge of seeing that the government is responsible," said Rudy Riefstahl, a spokesman for the group.

"We're here to protest the wiretaps, bugging, break-ins and abuses of civil liberties by the FBI, CIA and other government agencies. We want honest government and a restoration of individual rights and liberties."

ABOUT A DOZEN young demonstrators presented a skit on the Michigan Avenue sidewalk, showing the CIA and FBI attacking a woman dressed as the Statue of Liberty. The street theater ended with a "George Washington" character triumphing on behalf of civil liberties.

Riefstahl said the group lists about 100 members statewide and has chapters in 21 other cities.

The organization is sponsored by the Church of Scientology, which Riefstahl said has been victimized by illegal government acts.

"Last July, the Church of Scientology had its offices in Los Angeles raided by the FBI under a federal warrant. Although they were only supposed to search two drawers, they went through six floors and roused workers out of their staff quarters," declared the Michigan spokesman. "They claimed they found stolen government documents, but I'm not aware of any information being stolen."

A pamphlet issued by the protest group is entitled "Nightmare USA" and states:

● "Between 1960 and 1974, the FBI conducted 500,000 separate investigations of persons and groups under the 'subversive' category... Yet not a single individual or group was prosecuted."

● "The FBI and CIA conducted hundreds of illegal break-ins, many against American citizens and domestic organizations."

The 49-year-old Riefstahl, a local art curator, said it would be inaccurate to brand his group a "front" for the Church of Scientology.

"If we're a front for Scientology, then we're also a front for the Quakers, the Episcopalians and every other church," he said. "I happen to be a member of Scientology, but I'm also an Episcopalian."

"It's the job of the church to be involved in social reforms. I don't like saying we're a front for Scientology because that implies something covert. We don't hide the fact that we're supported by the Church of Scientology, but who sponsors us is less important than what we do as a group."

SCIENTOLOGY, Riefstahl said,

is a religion "based on the belief in the spiritual nature of man."

He added that "a number of members" of the protest group also belong to the Church of Scientology and that several are government workers. None of the latter were at yesterday's demonstration.

Riefstahl's group talked with government workers strolling on their lunch break.

"A lot of them feel caught between the hammer of the government and the anvil of our organization because they believe in what we're trying to do," he said.

"We had applications for 17 new members as a result of our demonstration. We think that's a good sign that people want to keep this country from becoming a dictatorship."